

SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND REPORTING DIVISION

ANALYSIS OF
SCHOOL JURISDICTION
1999-2002 EDUCATION
PLANS

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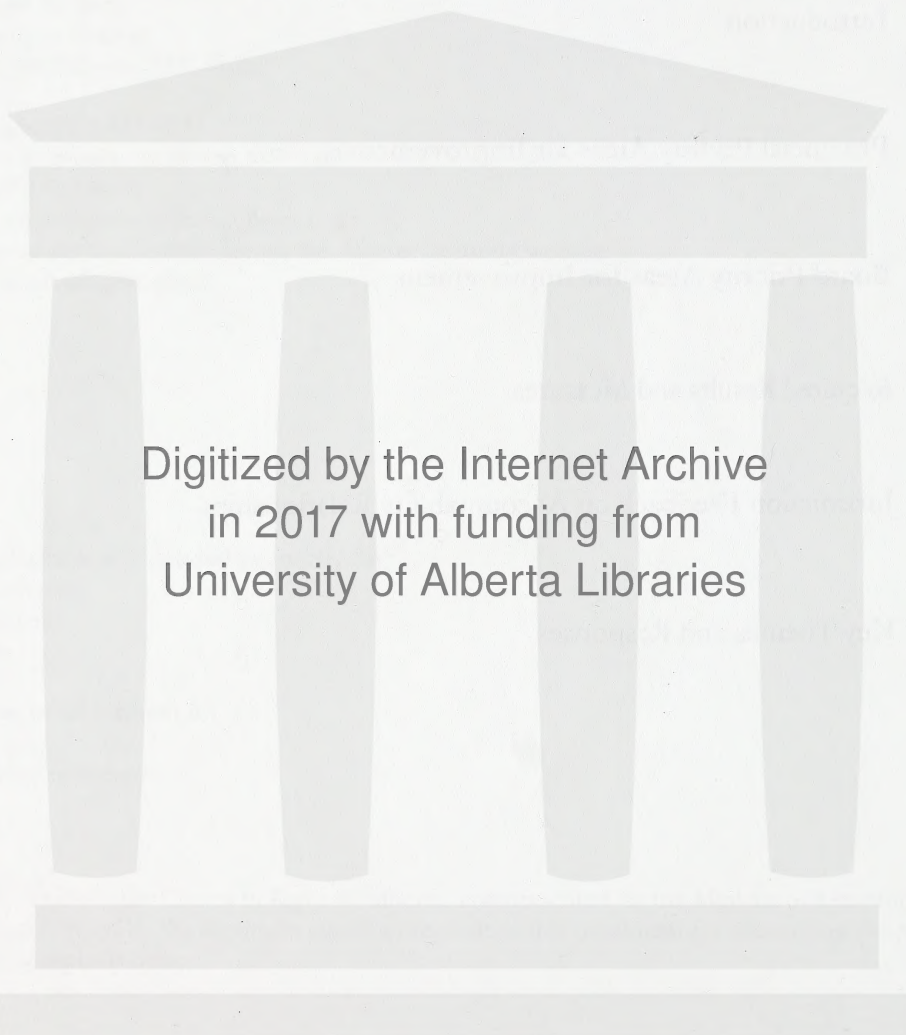
And may be of interest to:

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INTRODUCTION

School Jurisdiction 1999-2002 Education Plans were submitted to Alberta Learning in reference to a delayed due date in 1999 of June 30. The normal May 30 due date was altered to adjust for a late release of the Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting. Fifty-nine of 60 school jurisdiction plans are included in this analysis. One board that had recently undergone reorganization was given approval to delay submission of their plan.

The Education Planning and Results Team of the Regional Office and Native Education (RONE) Branch read each of the plans and completed a Review Form for each plan. RONE Jurisdiction Liaison Managers assigned to each school jurisdiction then scheduled face to face meetings with the superintendent or designate, typically in October 1999, to review and validate the plan and Review Form in relationship to the jurisdiction and provincial contexts. The validated plan Review Forms were then content analyzed to provide the information that is summarized below. Interview data provided by December 20, 1999 are included in this report.

PROVINCIAL PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Overview: All of the education plans made reference to the provincial priorities. Some jurisdictions included a specific section within their plan for the provincial priorities while others addressed the priorities within the context of the provincial goals. In most plans extensive strategies for addressing some or all of the provincial priorities are articulated in reference to goals.

Provincial Priority	% Included in Plan
Increasing high school completion rates	100%

Comments: Most jurisdictions specified strategies for this priority within provincial goal two. Some examples of strategies jurisdictions are implementing would include outreach or storefront schools, virtual schooling, career counseling, improved CTS course offerings and monitoring high school completion rates.

Provincial Priority	% Included in Plan
Improving secondary student achievement in Mathematics	100%

Comments: Strategies for this priority were typically linked to provincial goals one or four. To address secondary mathematics, jurisdictions are increasing program emphasis on Mathematics, developing lead teachers, working with regional consortiums to provide professional development opportunities, and/or inservicing staff on the new Mathematics curriculum.

Provincial Priority	% Included in Plan
Improving co-ordinated services to children	100%

Comments: Most jurisdictions specified strategies for this provincial priority in reference to provincial goal three in their education plan. Some examples of strategies boards are using would include participation in the Alberta Children's Health initiative and local agency coordination meetings.

Provincial Priority	% Included in Plan
Improving access to information technology	100%

Comments: Most jurisdictions specified strategies for this priority within provincial goal five. Some strategies being implemented would include: developing a division-wide technology plan, matching dollars from the school board to purchase new computers and training teachers to use technology in the management of students' records/data.

Provincial Priority	% Included in Plan
Improving public satisfaction	100%

Comments: Jurisdictions typically specified strategies for this priority within provincial goal two or seven. Strategies would include involving the press at key events, having district school council meetings to communicate with stakeholders, inservice for school councils and surveying the public for feedback.

BOARD PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Thirty-two of the school jurisdiction education plans included explicitly identified board priorities. Other plans included more implicit allusions to board priorities, but unless board priorities were clearly delineated, this analysis did not attempt to identify them.

Twenty-nine different priorities were identified. The most frequently mentioned priorities included: improving student achievement, implementing technology and thereby expanding alternative programs for students, enhancing counseling and career planning supports to students, ensuring safe and caring school environments, improving student and/or staff wellness, enhancing community partnerships, enhancing Catholic identity for Separate Boards, improving parent satisfaction, and ensuring quality teaching. In some instances board priorities reflected provincial priorities or goals and in others a unique emphasis was represented. The complete list of board priorities and the associated frequencies are presented in Table 1. Unique priorities, i.e. independent of the provincial three-year education plan, are noted with an asterisk.

Table 1 – Board Identified Priorities

Priority	Frequency
Student Achievement	12
Technology Outcomes / Alternative Delivery	11
Counselling Services – Career Development	6
Safe and Caring Schools	6
Student / Staff Wellness*	6
Community Partnerships	5
Enhance Catholic Identity*	5
Parent Satisfaction	5
Quality Teaching	5
Coordinated Services for Children	4
Early Literacy	4
English as a Second Language	4
Balanced Budget	3
Equity and Choice	3
Facilities Study*	3
Leadership Development*	3
Improving Student Conduct	3
Enhance Internal Relationships*	2
Implement a new communication plan	2
Small Rural Schools efficiency*	2
Special Needs Students	2
Support Staff competency standards*	2
FOIPP	1
Libraries*	1
Math Achievement	1
Native Education	1
Political Action*	1
Review Boundaries*	1
Transportation Study*	1

*Board priorities independent of the provincial three-year education plan

REQUIRED RESULTS AND MEASURES

Alberta Learning's *Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting* has been changed over the years to provide more flexibility to school jurisdictions in selecting what measures will be employed to assess progress achieved in relationship to provincially determined goals and results. Table 2 summarizes the degree of correspondence between the provincial requirements for results and measures and the extent to which boards addressed these requirements in their Education Plans.

Table 2 – Required Results and Measures Included in Plan

Item	Yes – n	No – n
Goal 1 Result 1 Students achieve learning standards	59	0
Goal 1 PAT Measure	59	0
Goal 1 Diploma Exam Measures	58	1
Goal 1 PAT Targets	49	10
Goal 1 Diploma Exam Targets	48	11
Goal 1 PAT Participation Rates	58	1
Goal 1 Diploma Exam Participation Rates	58	1
Goal 1 Result 2 – Students achieve education they need	58	1
Goal 1 Measure 2 – Students achieve education they need	56	3
Goal 2 Result 1 – School and program choice	58	1
Goal 2 Measure 1 – School and program choice	56	3
Goal 2 Result 2 – Parents, etc. have meaningful role	58	1
Goal 2 Measure 2 – Parents, etc. have meaningful role	52	7
Goal 3 Result – Services for children are coordinated	59	0
Goal 3 Measure 1 – Services for children	59	0
Goal 3 Result – All schools are safe and caring	59	0
Goal 3 Measure 2 – All schools are safe and caring	59	0
Goal 4 Result – Teachers professional growth	59	0
Goal 4 Measure 1 – Teachers professional growth	59	0
Goal 4 Result – Teachers help students achieve	59	0
Goal 4 Measure 2 – Teachers help students achieve	57	2
Goal 5 Result – Students have technology skills	59	0
Goal 5 Measure 1 – Students have technology skills	58	1
Goal 5 Result – Technology expands choice	59	0
Goal 5 Measure 2 – Technology expands choice	54	5
Goal 5 Result – Teachers able to integrate technology	59	0
Goal 5 Measure 3 – Teachers integrate technology	50	9
Goal 7 Result – Parents, etc. have timely information	59	0
Goal 7 Measure – Parents, etc. have timely information	58	1
Measures for ELI	54	5
Measures for ESL *	48	9
Measures for Sp.Ed.	45	14
Budget Spending Categories	52	7
Budget Information Communicated Clearly	51	8

*Francophone districts do not offer ESL programs.

JURISDICTION FEEDBACK ON ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIPS

Interviews with 59 superintendents or designates were completed regarding the 1999-2002 education plans. During the interviews between the RONE Jurisdiction Liaison Manager and the Superintendent or designate, several structured questions were asked to provide feedback on how the accountability relationships between Alberta Learning and School Boards might be improved. These questions and the responses, summarized through content analysis are detailed below.

QUESTION 1 – DESCRIBE THE PROCESS THAT LINKS YOUR JURISDICTION BUDGET TO YOUR PLANNING PROCESS.

Two related but separate themes were apparent in the analysis of responses to the question regarding budget and planning linkages. The first theme summarized in Table 3, focuses on the nature of the time relationship between planning and budget processes. The second theme focuses on the planning model used in relationship to budget processes and these responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 3 – Describe the process that links your jurisdiction budget to your planning process – focus on time relationships (n = 59 respondents)

Comment	Frequency	Percent
The districts plan or priorities are determined before the budget is established.	34	57.6%
The budget and plan are established using a parallel process at about the same time.	18	30.5%
The budget is established before the plan.	4	6.8%
Input from the schools helps to determine the Board's plan then the budget is established.	2	3.4%
No linkages exist between planning and budgeting	1	1.7%

The largest group of jurisdictions engage in a central planning process prior to the budget being established. It was clear from the interview that the plan drives the budget. An additional 3.4% of jurisdictions examine the goals and priorities outlined in each of its school plans before creating the jurisdiction's plan and then budget accordingly.

Thirty-one percent of the superintendents/designates described a parallel plan and budget process that resulted in the budget and the plan being developed through a highly interactive process. A small number of the superintendents/designates indicated that the budget was established before the education plan was created or linkages were non-existent.

Most boards engage in a dialogue with the school staff, school council and school community about the goals and priorities contained in the education plan. Superintendents/designates occasionally commented that there was very little discretionary funding because of school-based decision making, funding envelopes and the fact that teachers salaries make up such a large portion of the budget.

The planning model used in relationship to budgeting is described in Table 4.

Table 4 – Process that links the jurisdiction budget to planning - focus on planning model (n = 59 respondents)

Comment	Frequency	Percent
Needs assessment driven, the planning process is structured but interactive.	51	86%
Needs assessment driven by school based planning.	7	12%
Process under development.	1	2%

Additional comments:

- Site-Based Decision-making is seen as limiting Central Office flexibility.

The predominant planning model in use by jurisdictions is a centralized, structured needs assessment model, but with varying degrees of opportunity for interactive inputs. While some districts gather their stakeholders on a single day to provide feedback, other districts extend the opportunities for input over a longer time frame. A few jurisdictions premise their plans on direct input from the school based education plans.

QUESTION 2 – DESCRIBE THE PROCESS THAT LINKS YOUR SCHOOLS EDUCATION PLAN TO THE SCHOOL BOARD PLAN.

Two models were apparent in the responses to question 2. A centralized model was predominant. These responses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 – Jurisdiction - school education plan linkages (n = 59 respondents)

The board plan is established and communicated to the schools. Schools are expected to address the boards' goals and priorities described in the schools' plan.	40	68%
Emphasis is placed on a balance between the board and school-based goals and priorities.	17	29%
No formal linkage process – under development	2	3%

Additional comments:

- The plan needs to be a “working document.” It has to be flexible and usable in daily practice.
- Concern over the loss of local or school-based focus in the planning process.

Sixty-eight percent of the superintendents or designates indicated that while there are multiple opportunities for stakeholder input into the board's plan, the system plan drives the school plan. A number of interviewees described this process as being similar to how the provincial plan drives each school board plan. This model, in some contexts, gives rise to a concern that the local or school-based focus may be lost in centralized planning models.

Many of the superintendents or designates indicated that they provide principals with a “template” which indicates which board goals and priorities are required to be addressed at the school level. As mentioned in the previous questions 29% of the school boards have adopted a balanced approach to planning by considering school education plans in relationship to development of the district plan. Regardless of the planning model there seemed to be a more universal appreciation of the value of flexibility in planning processes.

QUESTION 3 – AT THE [AUGUST 1999] CASS-DEPUTY MINISTER’S MEETING, 61% OF PARTICIPANTS CALLED FOR A MUCH GREATER DEGREE OF INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN ALBERTA LEARNING AND THE FIELD TO IDENTIFY PROVINCE-WIDE PRIORITIES, GOALS, RESULTS AND MEASURES. HOW DO YOU THINK THIS CAN BE DONE?

Question 3 was intended to follow-up an important theme that was captured at the August 1999 CASS - DM Conference. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 – Suggestions for Increasing Alberta Learning-Field Accountability Interactivity (n = 59 respondents)

Item	Frequency
Continue/expand two-way communications re: accountability relationships - e.g. feedback, summary reports, etc.	37
Involve, consult and collaborate with Superintendents as colleagues in Alberta Learning’s plan development and priority setting	33
Base accountability on deductive model - general to specific from province to jurisdictions to schools; to support local priorities and focus on classrooms	11
Define audit trail/research base for provincial priorities/goals	7
Expand Alberta Learning’s/central office manpower commitment to accountability relationships with jurisdictions	7
Involve all key stakeholders to ensure provincial priorities reflect local priorities	6
Avoid over-reliance on email, but use it strategically with other communication efforts	5
Improve timing of provincial - jurisdiction planning relationship by releasing provincial plan earlier	4
Consider rural and urban differences	2
Alberta Learning should compensate CASS President’s jurisdiction for consultative time	1

The first two items, the need to continue/expand communications and the need to build more collegial accountability relationships were often, but not always mentioned together. These two items were mentioned by the majority of jurisdiction respondents. The third and fourth items are technical suggestions regarding ways to improve the accountability-planning model. The fifth item was usually related to a suggestion for closer working relationships between a jurisdiction and Alberta Learning relative to accountability. The sixth item regarding inclusivity of key stakeholders is related to the communications issue represented in the first item. The remaining items do not have high frequency counts, but warrant careful consideration given the qualitative value of the suggestion or observation.

QUESTION 4 – HOW IS THE GUIDE TO SCHOOL BOARD PLANNING AND REPORTING HELPFUL TO YOU IN YOUR PLANNING AND REPORTING ACTIVITIES? DO YOU HAVE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAKING THE GUIDE MORE USEFUL?

Question 4 was asked to gauge field response to the primary document that structures the accountability relationship between Alberta Learning and school boards. The responses are summarized in Table 7.

***Table 7 – Comments on the Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting
(n = 59 respondents)***

Item	Frequency
Found the guide to be useful or very useful	25
Guide needs to be released earlier (February)	20
The guide was fine, no changes necessary	11
Changes from year to year need to be highlighted	6
Liked the specific directions within the guide	3
Guide was “user friendly”	3
The overall plan needs to be more flexible	2
Streamline the process	1
Provide districts with a template	1
Need to change the format	1
Involve superintendents in making changes	1
Include examples	1
Guide was not useful at all	1
Change the date for submission	1

These responses indicate that the Guide is well received. However, timing related to the release date for the Guide is a critical issue affecting jurisdiction’s orientation to planning and reporting.

QUESTION FIVE – OTHER POINTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE REGARDING THE PLAN OR PLANNING PROCESS.

Of the 59 superintendent or designate interviews, 45 provided one or more additional miscellaneous comments summarized in Table 8. If a response to this question fit better in a table reported above and was not redundant to previously entered data for a jurisdiction then the item was added to a pre-existing table.

Table 8 – Miscellaneous Comments (n = 45 respondents)

Item	Frequency
The assistance provided by Alberta Learning in the preparation of the plan or in the review of the plan was helpful (+)	14
Planning and reporting were making a difference in their jurisdiction+	9
Alberta Learning accommodates and supports different styles of planning and plan writing (+)	6
Needs to be a simpler process for planning that highlights only changes made from year to year (-)	5
Needs to be continuity and inter-branch coordination from year to year in required goals, results and measures (-)	5
Planning initiatives are limited by budget resources (-)	5
If major changes are to be made to goals, results and measures due to creation of Alberta Learning then early notification, guide publication and rationale is needed (-)	4
Planning focuses provincial, jurisdictional and school improvement (+)	3
The cost of planning and reporting was a concern especially when there are many parts to both processes, for example Three-Year Plan, Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) and Management Information Reporting System (MIRS) (-)	3
More assistance was required (-)	2
Planning was not making a difference and was a great deal of work (-)	2
Support for different plan writing does not exist (-)	2
Plans need to be more reflective of what is happening in the jurisdictions (-)	3
Plans are becoming more reflective of what is happening at a local level (+)	2
Other avenues of communication are used to support planning, such as jurisdiction newspapers, issues papers	2

(+) positive connotation; (-) negative connotation

Overall, the comments reflect support for the planning process and for the accountability relationships with Alberta Learning. Concerns lie with imposed changes, breadth of planning required and costs.

On balance, 36 comments are positively oriented to planning, 29 present critical feedback and two (regarding other avenues of communication) were neutral.

KEY THEMES AND RESPONSES

PROVINCIAL AND BOARD PRIORITIES

Key Theme	Response
There is a high degree of congruence between the provincial and board priorities.	Alberta Learning will consider implications of this analysis in its own planning processes.

REQUIRED RESULTS AND MEASURES

Goal 1 – Education is focused on what students need to learn and students achieve high standards.

Key Theme	Response
For goal 1, the setting of targets for provincial achievement tests and/or diploma exams requires attention by one sixth of the school jurisdictions. This requirement may be found on page 11 of the <i>1999 Guide for School Board Planning and Reporting</i> under “Performance Measures.”	The System Improvement and Reporting and Basic Learning Divisions of Alberta Learning will work closely with jurisdictions to ensure target setting contributes a value-added component to analysis of provincial achievement tests and diploma exams.

Goal 2 – Education in Alberta is responsive to students, parents and communities.

Key Theme	Response
Seven districts had difficulty defining measures for the second provincial result, “Parents, business and community have a meaningful role in education.”	<p>Some suggestions for consideration by school jurisdictions would include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Percentage of schools with formal school/business partnerships (and percentage increase over previous year). 2. Percentage of employers who use career planning/employability portfolios when hiring high school students. 3. Percentage of schools who use community resources in the delivery of CTS, Work Experience and RAP. 4. Percentage of schools who involve community members or business in school council. 5. Percentage of parents/businesses who are satisfied with the opportunity to become involved in decisions at the school or with their role in education. 6. Percentage of parents who believe that School Councils fulfil a meaningful role in the school decision making process.

Goal 5 – Information technology is integrated into education to enhance student learning, and increase efficiency and flexibility of delivery.

Key Theme	Response
<p>Five plans were missing a measure for the provincial result regarding technology expanding program choice and flexibility, and nine plans were missing a measure for the result, “teachers are able to integrate technology in their instruction and management of student learning.”</p>	<p>Some suggested measures related to expanding program choice could include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Percentage of students accessing instruction via alternative delivery methods. 2. Percentage of students that are satisfied with the opportunity to engage in virtual or on- line instructional opportunities. 3. Percentage of students who use CD-ROM, Internet, Outreach Programs or on-line delivery. <p>Examples of measures regarding teachers’ integration of technology include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Percentage of staff satisfied with their ability to integrate computer technology into their work. 2. Percentage of staff satisfied that their work has been enhanced by computer technology. 3. Percentage of teachers using technology as a tool to improve learning 4. Percentage of teachers who are using technology to obtain information and gain access to the learning and teaching resources they need. 5. Percentage of teachers who report satisfaction with their level of ability to integrate information technology into instruction and the management of student learning. 6. Percentage of teachers who are using and creating learning activities in which the student uses information technology. 7. Percentage of parents satisfied with the use of computer technology for instruction.

Key Theme	Response
Five jurisdictions plans were missing measures for the Early Literacy Initiative, 9 jurisdictions were missing measures for English as a Second Language and 14 jurisdictions were missing measures for special education as required on page 16 of the <i>1999 Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting</i> .	<p>The System Improvement and Reporting Division will review optimal uses of Management Information Reporting System data within the accountability framework and school jurisdiction AERRs.</p> <p>With the advent of the System Improvement and Reporting Division, consideration should be given to more comprehensive, multi-method models of program evaluation targeted by the Management Information Reporting System.</p>

JURISDICTION FEEDBACK – INTERVIEWS WITH SUPERINTENDENTS

Question 1 – Planning and budget linkages

Key Theme	Response
Dynamic and interactive planning and budgeting linkages were described by superintendents. However, minimal discretionary funding is seen as limiting the strategic potential of planning.	Alberta Learning evaluate the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement's (AISI) capacity to improve strategic planning and the allocation of discretionary funding to critical need areas.

Question 1 – Planning models

Key Theme	Response
No single planning model should be considered the best, but should reflect the local context. Most jurisdictions are using a collaborative approach to planning.	Alberta Learning will share this observation in its feedback to jurisdictions, and will consider opportunities to celebrate or showcase examples of optimal collaborative planning processes.

Question 2 – School – jurisdiction planning linkages

Key Theme	Response
Highly interactive planning models between board level and school level planning are being implemented.	Alberta Learning will highlight this observation in its feedback to jurisdictions, and consider opportunities to celebrate or showcase examples of optimal school-board planning collaboration.

Question 3 – Improving interactivity between Alberta Learning and jurisdictions

Key Theme	Response
There is tremendous support for Alberta Learning's efforts to improve accountability relationships, communications and collaboration with the field, and to evolve an accountability model that reflects the needs and priorities of all levels of the basic learning system.	Alberta Learning, with the leadership of the Basic Learning Division and the support of the System Improvement and Reporting Division, will continue to prioritize the interactive nature of the accountability framework for basic learning.

Question 4 – Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting

Key Theme	Response
Most jurisdictions found the Guide useful in developing three-year education plans. However, it is essential the Guide be released earlier to meet strategic needs.	Alberta Learning will work to ensure the early release of the Guide to assist jurisdictions in the collaborative approach to accountability.

Question 5 – Open-ended feedback

Key Theme	Response
Feedback indicates the perception that the advantages of accountability relationships with the Ministry are counter-balanced with some disadvantages that limit the overall potential of the accountability framework to improve education for students.	Alberta Learning, with the leadership of the Basic Learning and System Improvement and Reporting Divisions, will continue to work with stakeholders to continuously improve the accountability framework for basic learning.

